Changes Surrounding The Legacy Of Taste

The city of Bristol and its connected history with the trans-Atlantic slave trade first began in 1698 (Bristol museums) when the London based Royal African company's monopoly ended. Creating an exploitation of Bristol's international port in which they shipped over one fifth of slaves who were carried on ships, creating an economic boost that increased opportunities due to the triangular trade system generating a population growth of up to 64,000 by the end of the 18th century. Thus, reshaping the city, as its legacy is still felt prominently today through the direct impact the significant figures who were apart of the slave trade and how they forever changed the city. This report considers how the cities perceptions of these figures has changed over time and how attitudes surrounding the legacy of the trans Atlantic slave trade in bristol have changed and manifested.

A key figure in the dispute over the remembrance of those involved in slave trade is Edward Colston who oversaw management of the royal African company. A company that is estimated (Bristol Radical History Group, 2020) to be responsible for shipping 84,500 enslaved people who had the company's branded acronym on their chest, with horrific conditions across the Atlantic, mortality rates were also estimated to be around 23%. Due to the incredible wealth he gained from the slave trade it caused his philanthropic efforts to permeate Bristol for centuries to come as he 'bequeathed £71,000 to charity'() at his death and funded local schools, almshouses, hospitals, and church restoration. Which led to the founding of schools, for both boys and girls, named after him. They still hold a day in his honour known as Colston day that takes place on the 13th of December. His legacy was again established through numerous landmarks in the city such as Colston hall. As well as most famously a statue erected of him in 1895 that a newspaper article at the time suggested that it was 'designed to encourage the citizens of today to emulate Colston's noble example and walk in his footsteps'. By perpetuating an idyllic and virtuous image of Colston that only remembers his charitable efforts made after his death while simultaneously disregarding his abhorrent participation and actions in the triangular trade system. He symbolises how the dark history of Bristol and its wealth received from the slave trade were disregarded because the benefits of trading for profit within the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade caused 'positive' repercussions within the city for centuries to come.

However, the positive remembrence of Colston has been challenged through new movements such as Black lives matter that dispute positive notions of those involved with slavery, causing debates surrounding how we remember the legacy of those involved with the slave trade in Bristol. On the 14th of June 2020 his statue was toppled by protesters, Colston hall also cut ties towards the merchant by changing its name to the Bristol beacon on the 23rd September 2020. Signifying a dramatic change in the perception of the slave trade from when it was first established. Highlighting how one change within the legacy of the slave trade in Bristol is the increased prominence of the lives of those enslaved instead of the slave owners. An example of this is Peros bridge as described in the Bristol slave trail the bridge was built in 1999 was named after Pero Jones a slave brought to Bristol by John Pinney a significant Bristol sugar merchant, Pero is estimated to still have died enslaved in 1798. Thus emphasising a change in thinking as Pero represents and commemorates all those affected by the city's participation within the triangular trade system, 'challenging Bristols secretive past'. Some scholars suggest

however that these innovations aren’t radical enough, as Wallace suggests ()‘walking across a bridge does not necessarily entail an act of political consciousness’, this sentiment could be described as somewhat accurate due to a bridge not being able to fully demonstrate centuries of plight, hardship and suffering those enslaved faced. When contrasted against Pero’s slave owner Pinney, who has a museum dedicated to him at his Georgian house, it again could emphasise sentiments of inequality especially when this view is taken with acknowledgement the Pinney family received reperations due to their loss in income when slavey was officially abolished in 1807 by the Government (UCL legacies of british slavery project). Suggesting that attitudes towards the slave trade institutionly had not significantly changed because these reperations weren’t paid off until 2015 (Hm treasury), therefore payments tawards the bridge and reperations would have happened silmultaneously through taxes, signifying no systematic changes in attitudes within Bristol. Nevertheless, it can be interpreted as unifying a city divided by its interlocked history with the slave trade and serve as a constant everyday reminder of the negative repercusions, contrasting constantly the romanticised view of the slave traders in the city.

To conclude the physical changes made throughout the city such as; forced takedowns of statues, name changes to historical landmarks and new architectural features within the city that signify new interpretations of history. Project outwardly a nuanced and evolved approach to the intertwined history of Bristol and the trans-Atlantic slave trade withing the city’s society that reflect the new decolonialised attitude towards the cities history. Confronting the cities innate need to acknowledge and illuminate the intertwined history of Bristol and the slave trade in its full context, instead of a one sided romantised view.